
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 3 August 2020

by Robin Buchanan BA (Hons), MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 02 September 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/R3650/D/20/3251587

2 Waverley Cottages, Crooksbury Road, Tilford, Farnham GU10 2AZ

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr and Mrs A Collier against the decision of Waverley Borough Council.
 - The application Ref WA/2019/2073, dated 6 December 2019, was refused by notice dated 13 February 2020.
 - The development proposed is the erection of extensions and alterations.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Background and Main Issues

2. The appeal site is in the countryside and within the Green Belt. The main issues are:
 - Whether the proposed development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt for the purposes of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework);
 - The effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt; and
 - If the proposed development is inappropriate development, whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, would be clearly outweighed by other considerations, so as to amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify it.

Reasons

Whether inappropriate development in the Green Belt

3. The Framework states that inappropriate development is harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. In addition, the construction of new buildings should be regarded as inappropriate development in the Green Belt subject to certain exceptions, including the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the 'original building'.
4. The main parties agree that the floorspace of the original building (the appeal property) is 79.7m², that the total floorspace of the extended building as proposed would be 151.9m² (discounting the existing outbuilding) and that the proposed floorspace addition over and above the size of the original building

would be a 90.6% increase. On the evidence before me, I have no reason to come to a different view. I also note that the supporting text to Saved Policy RD2 of the Waverley Borough Council Local Plan, April 2002 (the LP) indicates as a guideline that an increase in floorspace by more than 40% is likely to result in 'disproportionate additions'.

5. Considering the above, in absolute terms the appeal proposal would result in a building with almost double the amount of floorspace compared to the original building and, in percentage terms, would exceed the Council's guideline by more than twice over. It would therefore be a substantial increase in floorspace. In addition, relative to the compact form of the original building, the proposed side extension would have a wide double gable side elevation and a long front elevation. There would therefore also be a substantial increase in the size of the resulting building in terms of these dimensions and in overall volume, compared to the original building.
6. Accordingly, on this basis the appeal proposal would result in additions to the original building that would be disproportionate. No other potential exceptions, as cited in Framework paragraphs 145 and 146, have been put to me to suggest that the appeal proposal might, for other reasons, not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Consequently, the proposed development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and, in this regard, it would not accord with LP Saved Policy RD2 or Policy RE2 of the Waverley Borough Local Plan Part 1: Strategic Policies and Sites, February 2018 (the LPP1). It would also conflict with Framework paragraphs 143 and 145(c).

Openness of the Green Belt

7. The Framework states that the fundamental aim of the Green Belt is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. In addition, one of the essential characteristics of Green Belts is their openness.
8. I accept that the purpose of the appeal proposal is, in principle, compatible with location in the Green Belt. I also acknowledge that there are no public views of the appeal site and that it is tightly contained to one side and the rear by woodland, and on the other side by the appeal property. However, at the front, most of the side garden is elevated above the level of the adjoining access track and the immediate countryside beyond. Visually and spatially the open, undeveloped nature and extent of the side garden is therefore clearly discernible. Though the appeal proposal is modest in size relative to the extent of the wider Green Belt, it would nonetheless therefore occupy a significant proportion of the side garden and thereby reduce openness of the Green Belt, albeit to a very small extent.
9. Accordingly, the appeal proposal would not preserve the openness of the Green Belt. Consequently, on this basis, the proposed development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and, in this regard, it would not accord with LP Saved Policy RD2 or LPP1 Policy RE2. It would also conflict with Framework paragraph 133.

Whether very special circumstances exist

10. The Framework states that very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

11. I recognise that the appeal property has a relatively modest amount of floorspace and that the resulting house would have increased living accommodation, including that it may meet the appellant's existing and future needs (or those of a future occupier), may be more practical and may meet the Government's Nationally Described Space Standards. In addition, a satisfactory outdoor amenity space would be retained for the occupiers. I also acknowledge that the proposal seeks to restore an architectural and visual balance between No 2 and the already enlarged No 1 Waverley Cottages (albeit by a smaller size extension), including its detailed design which would be built to a high standard and incorporate the existing outbuilding as part of the living accommodation.
12. Although I am sympathetic to the aspirations of the appellant, the general circumstances of this case are not, however, exceptional since existing dwellings in the Green Belt, including those of such modest proportions as the appeal property, are not unusual. Many other Green Belt residents are likely to want to build sizeable extensions to their homes and could seek to support their proposals in the same manner as this appeal does. Accordingly, these benefits above, either individually or collectively, do not clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt that I have identified considering the importance given to protecting the Green Belt by national and local planning policy.
13. I acknowledge that the Council did not object to the appeal proposal for reasons of its effect on the character and appearance of the area (including as part of its assessment of 'disproportionate' having regard to the supporting text to LP Saved Policy RD2), effect on the living conditions of the occupiers of No 1 or due to any biodiversity concerns, including trees protected by a tree preservation order. However, the absence of harm in these matters is a neutral factor and does not lead me to conclude differently in terms of very special circumstances.
14. Consequently, while I also appreciate that the appellant contends that the proposal would not offend any of the five purposes of the Green Belt, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development do not exist. The proposed development would not accord with LPP1 Policy RE2. It would also conflict with Framework paragraph 144.

Conclusion

15. The proposed development would be inappropriate development and would lead to a very small loss of openness to the Green Belt. Framework paragraph 144 indicates that when considering planning applications substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt. In this appeal, the harm to the Green Belt is not outweighed by any very special circumstances.
16. For the reasons given, the appeal does not succeed.

Robin Buchanan

INSPECTOR